

Mapes Creek Walkway:

Seattle Design Commission Recommendations



Project Description

The Site and Previous Efforts

The Mapes Creek Walkway encompasses approximately a two block stretch of 52nd Ave S., between Rainier Ave S. and S. Henderson St. in Rainier Beach. The Walkway lies between the Lake Washington Apartment complex to the east and single family detached homes to the west, a McDonalds, and Safeway grocery store at the south terminus and another large grocery store and Rainier Beach High School at the north terminus. The walkway is heavily used by high school students, shoppers, and other community members. It serves as a pedestrian and bicycle route from the southeastern part of the neighborhood to the commercial core, as well as the Rainier Beach light rail station a quarter mile to the west. It lies on the southeastern part of the Rainier Beach Residential Urban Village and is in the heart of the neighborhood near locally-oriented retail and services, the library, and community center. It also serves as a gathering and green space for the community. At the south end, approximately one block, is a paved street. The northern section is an at-grade, paved walkway approximately 8-feet above drainage swales on both sides.

In 1999, the community completed a plan for a walkway that envisioned a paved path with benches, lighting, signage, and plantings. The plan also included improvements to nearby pedestrian crossings, and a gateway plaza at Henderson St. among other things. Some aspects of the plan were completed in 2002:

- A plaza at Henderson St. with art, seating and landscaping
- Lighting
- Improved pedestrian crossing at Henderson
- Parks Levy funds (2005) were spent on replanting, and a sidewalk connection to Rainier Ave. was built.

There are now plans to redirect the flow of Mapes Creek, which runs directly under the walkway, and daylight it in nearby Be'er Sheva Park. This will entail complete removal of the pipe that runs under the walkway from Fisher Pl. S. and S. Henderson St. and installation of a new diversion pipe and a diversion structure underground where Fisher Place S. and the walkway

intersect. Coordinating improvements to the walkway with this project provides new opportunities, though project funding has not yet been obtained.

Current Planning Efforts

Mapes Creek Walkway had been planned by the community and the plan had been only partially implemented. Southeast Seattle Effective Development (SEED) felt there was potential to update the plan and the Seattle Design Commission approached them to help update the plan and to provide expertise on the drainage and open space design aspects.

Two design workshops were held in June of 2009. At the first meeting, Design Commissioners, SEED staff, and community members met at the Mapes Creek Walkway and discussed site conditions, previous planning efforts and potential improvements. After the site visit, the meeting moved to SEED's offices and initial ideas were discussed.

The second meeting was held at DPD downtown and included staff from SDOT, SPU, the Parks Department, Seattle Design Commissioners, SEED staff, and the manager of the Lake Washington Apartments, which abuts the eastern property line of the site. In the first part of the meeting, City staff and the community organizations discussed the current conditions and maintenance issues of the site. Plans were heard for an eventual creek diversion, which would entail replacing the existing pipe under the walkway and adding diversion facilities where S. Fisher Pl. meets the walkway. The Design Commissioners began generating design concepts with participation from City staff, SEED staff and the apartment manager.

The ideas generated circled around improvements that would make the walkway corridor easier to maintain, improve performance of the drainage swales, and encourage more positive, desirable activity to the area. A full list of the recommendations follows.

Challenges of the Site

Walkability.

According to a recent study by SDOT, southeast Seattle has the lowest number of people walking on a regular basis of all of Seattle's neighborhoods. One aim is to create a better pedestrian experience for this area.

Swales.

The swales that exist along both sides of the walkway drain very slowly causing the water to be fairly stagnant. They are also effectively trash collectors and habitat for rodents. Although neighbors have planted cattails and other hydrologic vegetation and ducks have been seen in them, primarily they are a nuisance because of the rodent infestation. SPU assures that the swales are draining properly.

Steep Slopes.

Due to the steepness of the slopes along both sides of the walkway, routine mowing for maintenance is not feasible. Additionally, the steep slopes make necessary maintenance for establishing plants more difficult as well the inclusion of other design elements or treatments.

Unsuitable Plantings.

Some existing vegetation around the plaza and along the walkway is not appropriate for the location and use, and the level of maintenance that is able to be provided. Too much weeding is needed to keep the area in the condition that was intended by the previous plan. Current maintenance includes: weeding two times a year by the Rainier Beach Merchants' Association; weeding at the north and south ends of the walkway four times a year by the Parks Department, mowing along the walkway in late spring and early fall by SDOT, and care for the trees as needed by SDOT's arborist.

Litter.

Litter is a big problem along the walkway. Fast food wrappers among other things litter the site. In the south and north ends of the walkway, the Parks Department removes litter three times a week, and empties the trash cans twice a week.

Difficult to Maintain.

Though coordinated among the departments, a minimal level of maintenance is provided. As the level of disrepair of the Henderson Plaza, the littering and the problem of rat infestation show, much could be achieved with a higher level of maintenance, or design changes to make the area less maintenance intensive.

Crime.

There is community concern about the potential for criminal activity along the walkway. During our site visit two police officers spoke with the group and said that there have been some minor incidences of gambling and drug use along the walkway, as noted by Rainier Beach High School and Lake Washington Apartments. The officers mentioned that pursuing criminals through this path can be difficult because of the locked bollards and poorly maintained access points at S. Fisher Pl. and S. Director St. Some neighbors have expressed that they don't feel safe walking along the corridor and prefer other routes to get where they are going.

Seattle Design Commission's Recommendations:

City Level

- Provide comparably higher amounts of City funding for maintenance here. The condition of the site points to a need for more attention than is currently being provided.
- Consider designation of the Mapes Creek Walkway as a "Green Street" or "Park Boulevard." Developing right-of-way into open space amenities uses existing resources wisely and avoids the high cost of acquiring new park land. Due to its location in the heart of the community and its use by so many people, Design Commissioners view this as a prime location for such a designation and for Parks Levy Opportunity Funds investment.

Amenities

- Provide seating at mid-points along the walkway in addition to the ends. Limit seating to one side so that a bottle neck effect is not created.
- Provide more trash and recycling receptacles along the walkway.

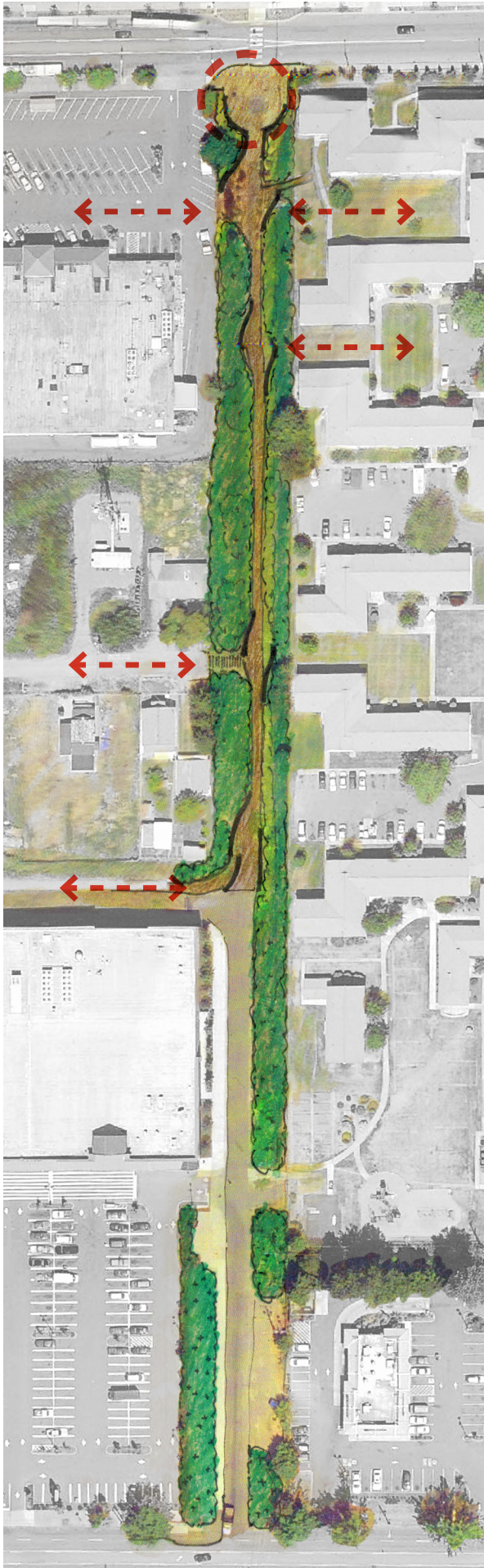
Activation

- Provide art as a community investment. Involve the community in integrating art on the site. Banners, art pieces, programming, like festivals, are among the possibilities.
- Activate the walkway with new uses to improve public use and visibility. P-patches and small scale markets could generate community activity, microeconomic opportunities and generally increase the amount of desirable use of the space. Festivals could bring energy to the corridor and shed a new light on the area as a recreational space.

Planting & Edges

- Replace sections of the landscaping with plantings that are more appropriate to the site use and location. Use less formal plantings that will look good with minimal weeding or other maintenance. The plant palette should be low growing to allow for visibility throughout the site.
- "Fray" the edges of the walkway and/or plazas where they meet the landscaped areas to create a less stringent and less formal appearance.

* review the last page for example of frayed edge



Swales & Drainage

- Explore opportunities to make the location of the piped stream visible on the surface through surface materials, art intervention, etc.
- Allow the engineering to be visible to the public in some way, such as making part of the pipe visible by cutting away part of the slope once the Mapes Creek diversion and daylighting project proceeds.
- Use the stream diversion project as an impetus to update the plaza and art, which are showing signs of age. Perhaps this can be part of the mitigation for impacts to the neighborhood of the diversion project.
- Improve the quality and function of the swales.

Landscaping

- Eliminate the feeling of “no man’s land” by working with the grades, views, and movement.
- Create a shallower slope on one side of the walkway to improve landscape maintenance options and plant selections.

Connections

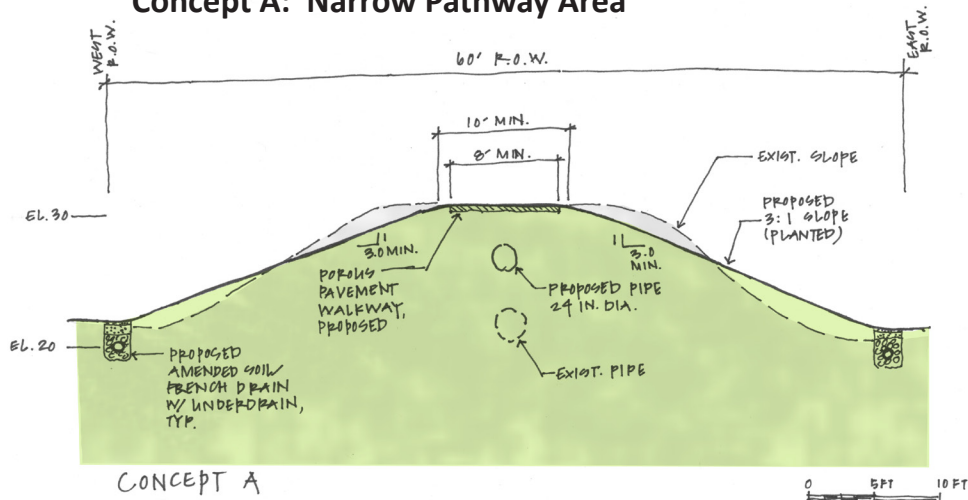
- Provide more east and west permeability from the walkway and open up the edges of the corridor. The walkway could be better connected at S Director St and the library. The area where the walkway meets S Fisher Pl., behind the Safeway, could be accentuated and extended. More openings to the Lake Washington Apartments would allow a better connection for people moving east to west and facilitate access for people east of the walkway to the business area.

South End

- Provide a plaza at the south end of the walkway, south of the Safeway entrance. At the very least mark the edge of the street here more clearly. There is currently a large graveled area along the east side of the street that is used by school buses and other large vehicles for layover, as well as dumpsters and clothes donation receptacles. On the west side of the street there’s a swath of graveled property between the sidewalk and the Safeway parking lot that is not landscaped. This area holds potential for landscaping. A plaza design at this end of the walkway could integrate and connect the Safeway and McDonalds, as well as the layover and clothing collection functions in a more attractive way.
- The paved hammerhead turnaround at S. Fisher Pl. at the back of the Safeway provides an opportunity to provide a plaza.
- Explore the installation of a pedestrian crossing and/or curb bulbs at Rainier Ave. S to connect the Mapes Creek Walkway at the southern terminus.

Three Concepts

Concept A: Narrow Pathway Area



Description: Reduce level area surrounding pathway on both east and west sides to allow for shallower adjacent slopes (1V:3H minimum.). Add french drains with underdrains at base of each slope. Replace existing asphalt pathway with porous pavement pathway.

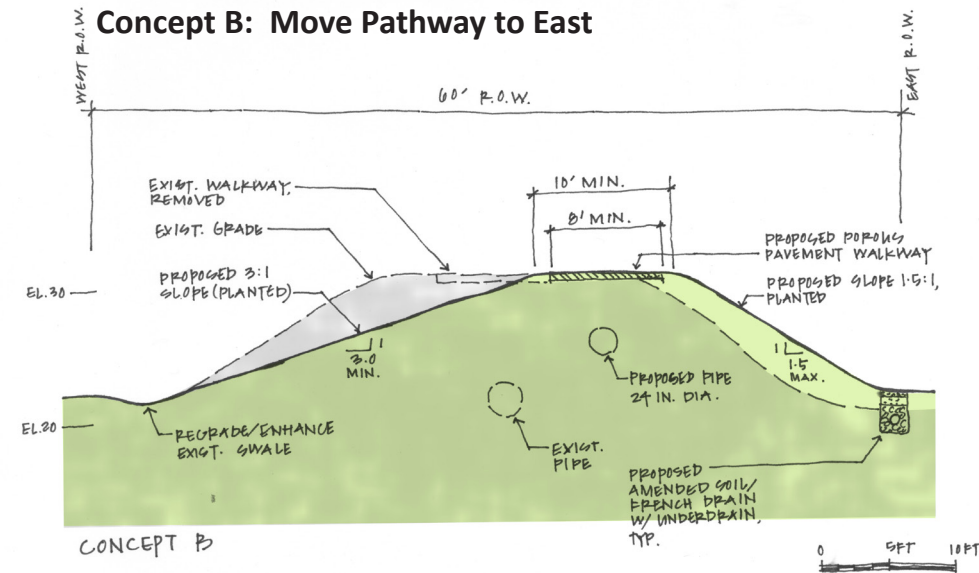
Pros:

- 1:3 slope can be mowed allowing for improved maintenance throughout ROW.
- No retaining walls are needed.
- Improved drainage and maintained vegetation should improve rodent problems.
- Maintained vegetation should improve visibility and sense of security.

Cons:

- Even with pathway area narrowed to 10-ft, 1:3 min. slopes may not be achievable without low retaining walls.
- Additional maintenance needed for French drains.

Concept B: Move Pathway to East



scription: Reduce level area surrounding pathway and move thwy east to allow for shallower adjacent slope (1V:3H nimum.) on west side of pathway. Regrade or enhance sting swale at west ROW line as needed. Add French drain th underdrain at base of slope at east ROW line. Replace sting asphalt pathway with porous pavement pathway.

CS:

1:3 west slope can be mowed allowing for improved maintenance and improved visibility and sense of security.

No retaining walls are used.

Improved drainage should improve rodent problems.

Uses existing swale along West ROW line.

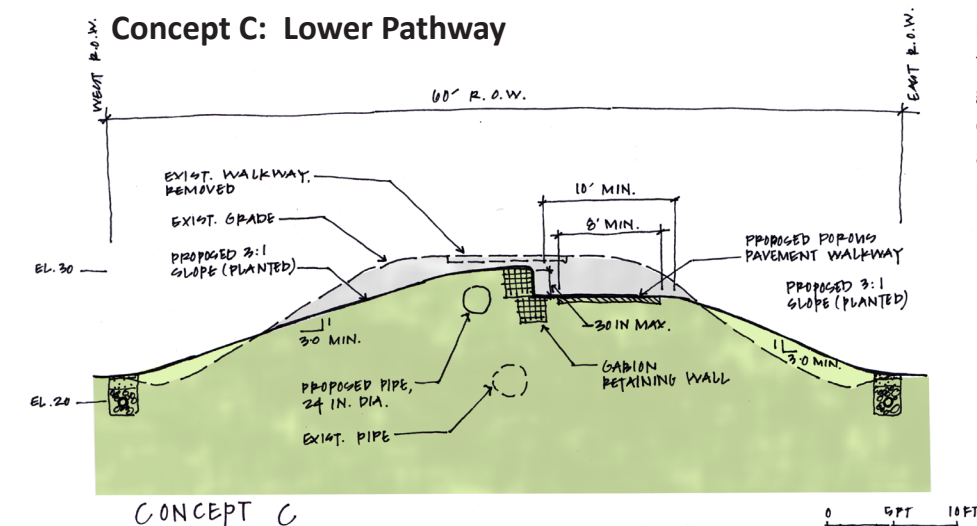
၁၈၈၆

East slope can not be mowed due to steepness.

In order to achieve a 1:3 west slope, 1:1.5 east slope may not be achievable without low retaining walls.

Additional maintenance needed for French drain along East ROW line.

Concept C: Lower Pathway



Description: Reduce and lower level area surrounding pathway to allow for shallower adjacent slopes (1V:3H min.). Add gabion retaining wall adjacent to pathway to provide sufficient coverage for proposed pipe. Add French drain with underdrain at base of east slope.

Pros:

- Slopes can be mowed allowing for improved maintenance and improved visibility and sense of security.
- Improved drainage should improve rodent problems.
- Gabion wall provides seating along length of pathway.

Cons:

- Additional maintenance for French drains.
- Retaining wall needed.
- Gabion retaining wall may need to be higher than 30 in to achieve 1:3 slopes both west and east of pathway.



Example of “frayed” edges.



Conclusion

The Mapes Creek Walkway is a valuable amenity in the Rainier Beach community. The Design Commission and SEED are glad to have worked with representatives from the community and City departments to update the Mapes Creek Walkway plan and provide ideas for improvements to be made in the near future, and when the Mapes Creek diversion project is undertaken by SPU. The changes proposed to the walkway will make it easier to maintain, more attractive and even more actively used than it is today.

Working on this site has raised the familiarity of the Design Commission with this part of town. Commissioners have mentioned the Mapes Creek Walkway to project managers planning capital improvement projects in the vicinity or with similar issues. Looking so closely at one pedestrian pathway with park-like qualities in a right of way has brought awareness of the complexities of this hybrid type of facility.

Seattle design Commission

Participants

Julie Parrett Design Commissioner, Landscape Architect

Nathan Polanski Design Commissioner, Civil Engineer

Norie Sato Design Commissioner, Artist

Guillermo Romano Design Commission Director, Architect

Valerie Kinast Design Commission Coordinator, Urban Planner

Abbey Norris Public Art Manager for SeedArts (program of SEED)

Pat Chemnick SouthEast Effective Development (SEED)

Dawn Blanche Rainier Beach resident

Barb Bionado Lake Washington Apartments Manager

Jennifer Britton SDOT

Julie Hall SPU

Deb Heiden SPU, Asset Manager

Debbie Maxfield SPU, Field Operations & Maintenance

Cheryl Eastberg Parks and Recreation

With support from:

Sam Woods SDOT

Holly McCracken SPU

